

**SCRIPTURALLY DIRECTED ACTION: A RADICAL
STANCE IN CONTEMPORARY SOCIETY —
biographical notes on Prof J A L Taljaard.**

The time has come for students, colleagues and friends to pay homage to *Jan Adriaan Louw Taljaard*, one of the South African pioneers in philosophy, dedicated to the task of elaborating a vision of reality according to the spirit of God's Word, and committed to a Christian order of life, wrested from the destructive powers of archaic orthodoxy and from both past and contemporary humanism.

Taljaard's philosophical position is "reformed". His answer to many problems in philosophy as well as in the various scientific disciplines, and especially problems created by the crisis of so-called post-Christian western civilization, has been an endeavour in fellowship with those past and present who believe in the free Word of God. His philosophic ideas developed in close contact with, for example, H G Stoker, D H T Vollenhoven, H Dooyeweerd, S U Zuidema, H van Riessen, C G Seerveld, A H de Graaff.

Born 29 October 1915, he grew up in a family of thirteen children in the Transvaal "platteland" (rural regions) at Standerton, where he matriculated in 1933 amidst the confusion created by the economic depression and disruptive political trends particularly prevalent in Afrikaner ranks. This crucial experience had a profound influence on his life: henceforth he would be involved in the struggle of his people for a cultural and political identity, a struggle to find a God-given place in the South African community. Thus he became enthusiastically involved in youth affairs, and made his mark in the Reformed Youth Organization ("Jongeliedevereniging") of the thirties and forties.

Encouraged by his parents, Cornelis Jansen Taljaard and Margaretha Johanna (née Stapelberg), as well as by his grandfather Cornelis Jansen — who was a minister of the "Reformed Church of the Cross" under the spiritual guidance of the well-known Rev S J du Toit, leader of the "Genootschap voor Regte Afrikaners" (a cultural movement for the advancement of the Afrikaans language during the previous century) — Taljaard enrolled at the

Potchefstroom University College for Christian Higher Education as a B A student in 1934, preparatory to theological studies. At this University it was possible for him to pursue these studies without pressure to abandon or dilute his Christian principles. In his second year, however, financial difficulties forced him to discontinue his studies and to go to work on a gold mine. The urge towards knowledge and academic studies soon led him to enrol at the University of South Africa for correspondence courses in Logic and Ethics.

The second World War incisively affected his daily life and intellectual development. On 6 February, 1942, Taljaard found himself a political prisoner, the fate of many a prominent Afrikaner involved in the organization of the Afrikaners in the National Party and the passionate anti-imperialist struggle for political freedom and a cultural identity, as visualised by the so-called "Ossewa-brandwag" movement in its comprehensive Republican ideal. It was here, in the internment camp at Koffiefontein, where he was held until November 1944, that he became acquainted with his fellow prisoner and tutor, Prof H G Stoker and with Stoker's commitment to Christian scientific studies as well as with his enthusiasm for a comprehensive Cosmology, Epistemology and Methodology, in which the pre-scientific life and world-view fulfils its directive function in an honest, systematic and critical way. Within the confines of his restricted existence Taljaard was moulded by Stoker's Calvinistic conception of "God and creation", "mind and reality", "man in the cosmic order", "man and values", "Biblical faith and society".

He completed the various courses of his second year B A in the internment camp. In 1945 he obtained the B A degree with distinction at the Potchefstroom University College. The next year he was appointed student-assistant, later junior lecturer, and then lecturer at his Alma Mater, teaching Psychology and Philosophy, and eventually Philosophy only, introducing students — mostly prospective ministers of the church — to the philosophy of the "idea of creation" as it was developed by Prof H G Stoker in critical conjunction with the philosophy of the "idea of revelation" (H Bavinck) and the philosophy of the "cosmonomic idea" (H Dooyeweerd).

In the spirit of his tutor, Taljaard completed the M A degree in 1947 with a thesis on the ontic status of values in the philosophy of B Bosanquet, W Stern and R B Perry. In September, 1950, he continued his studies in Psychology and Philosophy at the Free University of Amsterdam, the latter of the two fields of study under Prof Dr D H T Vollenhoven, in spite of a well meant admonition of a visiting Dutch theologian: "May God protect you!", but with at least the firm support of his wife, Dirkie Jacoba van Rooy, to whom he was married in 1948.

The motive, style, method and result of Vollenhoven's nuance of Christian philosophy became his own. In the succeeding years Taljaard set himself the task of applying these acquired systematic insights of Vollenhoven. He tried to develop an approach to reality which in no way accommodates any non-Christian or non-Radical-Christian reflections. He laboured at a philosophical system basic to specific subjects and furthering a fundamental answer to diverse ultimate questions. He countered the current cultural crisis, as represented and interpreted by the "New Left", such as Neo-Marxism, by a proposal for a radical "New Right" movement.

Taljaard's hermeneutic key to reality was shaped on the pattern of Vollenhoven's perspective: God (the Sovereign), the law (given and maintained by God) and the cosmos (subjected to the law). This also furthered his response to the main trends in the history of western philosophy and the typological differences between representatives of successive philosophical currents of thought. Thus he considered it his duty to criticize all forms of subjectivism in non-Christian circles, as well as scholastic notions in the scientific endeavours of fellow Christians, both contemporaries and predecessors.

As his philosophic perspective matured, a critical stance developed at the same time towards his own academic background, including the philosophy of the "idea of creation" (Stoker). Influenced by his studies in the history of western philosophy and its diverse philosophic problems, Taljaard gradually developed a distinctive view on specific topics. To him it meant more than a scientific model, more than a philosophical theory, more than a pre-scientific belief — it implied a confession, based on the Word of God, indeed a religious perspective and a way of life.

In spirit he remained closely attached to the thought-world of Vollenhoven after obtaining a doctorate in Philosophy in 1954 with a thesis on Franz Brentano as philosopher. Thus he shifted the accent from a Cosmology (Dooyeweerd, Stoker) to an Ontology comprising God, the law and creation. He dissociated himself from the phanerocritical epistemology of Stoker (and Bavinck), and preferred, in simple diction, a direct relation of knower and knowable. In his Anthropology he stressed the human heart as a temporal, pre-functional centre of all human activity — in contradistinction to the Dooyeweerdian conception of a concentration point of cosmic diversity. His Theory of Science acknowledged the necessity of a direct and free access of every scientist, including the philosopher, to the revelation of God in his Word, denying an exclusive access to Theology. Gradually Taljaard encountered challenging problems and puzzling, sometimes even unacceptable difficulties in accentuations and ideas of kindred spirits in Calvinistic philosophy and orthodox theology. Thus, for example, he criticized Stoker's religious *a priori*, contingency-idea, philosophy of values and concept of idiostances. Dooyeweerd's exposition of the idea of "sovereignty and universality in every cosmic sphere" Taljaard eventually countered with an Ontology of existentialia.

In this way students and colleagues shared the birth-pangs of his philosophy — a philosophy which Taljaard considered Biblically justified though no Biblicism; science and in no way speculation; stressing the sovereignty of God and his Word, but no genuflection to a theologising of science. In class he combined an informal didactic approach with his flair as connoisseur of theoretical terms. Many a student and colleague, listening to him in lectures or conversation, was struck by the remarkable way in which old truths sometimes made their entrance. The radicalism with which he sometimes presented his ideas and elaborated novel aspects of his philosophical perspective, struck many a former pupil with astonishment, and occasionally even shocked ...

History attests that the course of life of those who design individual patterns of thought, sometimes against trusted convictions, is often one of increasing loneliness and academic isolation. Because of his conviction and distinctive temperament, Prof Taljaard could not be diplo-

matic without sacrificing his convictions; he could not idly allow the ripples at the edges to accustom public opinion without disavowing the religious motive of his intellectual ideals. And yet he coupled his plea with a singular proviso, which time and again echoed in the ears of his students : "... as far as I can discern now ..." The sincerity and enthusiasm of his scientific ideal caught the eye even of those who differed basically. He modified his systematics and historiographical perspective with an amazing open-mindedness, focussing on the needs of man in our time, and particularly the problems of twentieth century youth. No wonder that many a student found in him a kindred soul, even a personal friend. To him all human activity, also his own, is activity of the heart, activity where the whole person acts in unity with — or without — his Father in heaven.

After his return from the Netherlands in 1956 Taljaard was promoted to senior lecturer in Philosophy at the Potchefstroom University for Christian Higher Education. In 1964 he became professor and, when Prof Stoker retired, he was appointed head of the department of Philosophy in 1965. His colleagues came to know him in his typical, sometimes hyper-democratic organization of his department, his zeal for a really radical scriptural science, which should penetrate to the root of all thought, and his idealism as far as inter-disciplinary communication and continental inter-university co-ordination were concerned. His commitment to and endeavours in the interest of a Christian university, where a Christian philosophy would be accorded the basic function of guiding all concerned within the academic community to an ontologically based Christian science, brought him to participate actively in various aspects of academic life. Thus he served, for example, on the executive committee of the Institute for the Advancement of Calvinism.

A genuine interest in education and in its theoretical basis, stimulated him to a philosophical reflection on education and the problems inherent in teaching techniques. During the past decade Taljaard has become increasingly convinced of a pressing need of what he terms 'polished lenses'. The 'lenses' of the 'spectacles' (pre-scientific vision of reality) through which Christians regard reality, had to be polished ... with a genuinely scriptural concept of reality. His Anthropology and

Social Theory regard man as an entity acting in all spheres of communal life, each sovereign in its own sphere, but in the service of the all-embracing kingdom of God. Accordingly Taljaard could not confine himself exclusively to the claims of academic life. He served in his church as an elder, addressed South African audiences at national gatherings, qualified himself as officer in command of the University Regiment. By word and deed — numerous articles and active participation in school committees attest this — he furthered the idea of a free independent school which belongs to neither Church nor State, but where the State sees to the standards to be met, the parents fulfil their rightful functions, and every teacher is qualified with at least a responsible pre-scientific view as part of his academic training. Taljaard is a family man with three children, a family devotedly concerned with his joys and sorrows, his ideals and setbacks.

Acknowledgement came in due course. Since 1964 he has been a full member of the South African Academy for Science and Art, proving himself a cultural leader and philosopher at the same time. He serves on the Bursary Committee for Theology, Philosophy and Classical Languages of the Human Sciences Research Council. From 1972 to 1975 he was the chairman of the Philosophical Society of Southern Africa, a society of philosophers from different states, various communities and different trends of philosophical thought: phenomenologists, existentialists, language-analytical philosophers, and also a substantial number of kindred spirits attached to the idea of christian scientific studies. In spite of the radical nature of his religious philosophic motive, one of his serious concerns has been to communicate with other philosophical convictions current in Southern Africa.

His students, colleagues and friends know him in his avowed attachment to the spirit of the Reformation, and in his efforts towards a distinctive philosophical community in line with it. Insights may differ on how successfully he taught his students not only *what* to think, but in a constructive, critical and selective way exactly *how*; not only *that* a Christian methodology is possible but also its relevance to practical research. But no one can deny that he exerted himself to give his students relevant academic equipment, that he was the person who

helped them to take the first enthusiastic steps towards solving diverse problems. When on occasion some could not keep pace with the development of his ideas, and when others on the contrary thought fit to transcend his basic point of view, sometimes exploring new horizons or developing different ways of thinking and different philosophical styles, Taljaard could not always fathom the mystery of divergence nor accompany the *avant garde*. Yet even in circumstances such as these the hallmark of his teaching is apparent in his familiar advice: "... do not swear by the words of an earthly teacher ...". And that, the critical spirit, is the characteristic trait of those students with whom he worked more intimately.

Of course our biographical sketch could not sufficiently highlight every contribution Taljaard made to various philosophical disciplines, but at least one perspective is clear: all the subjects on which he worked, like Anthropology, Epistemology, Social Theory, Philosophy of Education and of Art, Ethics and the History of Philosophy, find a sharp focus in his all-embracing ontology: the being of God, the law and the creation.

Rev J A Kruger.

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